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ABSTRACT

The study reported in this newsletter looked closely at one community, a city school district in a northeastern state, where the pace of change in public schools was especially rapid and unusual over a seven-year period (1965-72). The purpose was to find out, through interviewing, the thoughts of a selected number of informed individuals and families concerning the school district and the changes taking place. The oral history method of asking open-ended questions and encouraging freedom of response was adhered to. Interviews covered questions on leadership from the superintendent and other sources, causes for change, effects of changes, the innovative elementary school and alternative junior high school, and communication. A comparison of views of the two groups resulted in findings that suggest strategies for educational planners. These suggestions include a need for (1) assuming a general acceptance of alternatives, (2) careful prior planning, (3) carefully defining and setting of goals, (4) considering the interests of all consumers, (5) using school board meetings as communication agency, (6) maintaining a balance in any change process, (7) financing changes, (8) professional and educational change, and (9) providing an environment conducive to change. (Author/ND)

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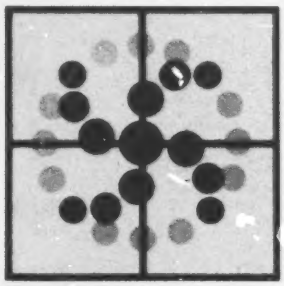

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Community Reaction to Educational Change

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Change in public education is a continuous process. Though the pace of change may be an issue – some persons criticize the public schools for lagging in the face of needed reforms, while others see the schools as changing too much – the evidence over a long period shows that schooling tends to reflect the temper of the times. New curricula, standards, pedagogy, or modes of organization emerge regularly in response to changes in the society as these are reflected in demands on public education.

As the pace of social and technological change has accelerated, the rate of changes occurring in public schools has also quickened measurably. In American public education, we have moved through at least 4 major cycles of emphasis in less than 30 years: from "life adjustment", to stress on academic disciplines and professional training, to "alternatives" and "free schools", to the current stress on career goals. It is profitable to study how communities (or at least involved or affected segments of communities) react to the quickened pace of school change. Only in this way can we guide future planning for change and try to assure that changes are brought about in both a democratic and an orderly way. More radical changes – such extreme alternatives as free schools – are especially precarious because they can divide communities sharply on the basis of deeply held tenets of behavior.

Especially vulnerable to criticism are changes designed primarily to bring about social change. Where a use of buses to achieve racial balance or a hiring policy to serve the same purpose is initiated, community reactions may be expected to be as sharp and conflicting as they are in reaction to legislated or mandated forms of more general social change. Recent moves to extend the power of students over their own educational experiences, eminently reasonable in theory, are apt to be assailed by adults who feel insecure about the existing degree of independence of the young. Even the way schools are managed, or the way the public thinks they are managed, may affect community attitudes strongly. Rapidly rising school taxes, turbulent school board meetings, restrictions on parents visiting the schools, new school communications procedures, teachers bargaining with school boards – these changes become social concerns when they affect the pocketbook, the sense of public decorum, or the dignity of the individual.

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Many more recent changes in public education cause particular unease; they influence people deeply and are often controversial. Rapid consolidation of districts, new building programs, or the growing regional cooperative efforts (BOCES in New York) challenge tradition and disrupt old patterns of behavior, despite the good results they may bring to the educational scene. Rapid changes within schools such as new forms of reporting pupil progress, the use of learning centers, British primary school patterns in elementary grades, or mini-course electives in high schools, may confuse and disturb pupils and their parents and sharply challenge the educational precepts of adults.

In this study, we looked closely at one community, a city school district in a northeastern state, where the pace of change in public schools was especially rapid and unusual over a 7-year period (1965–1972). The school district includes a small city, its suburbs, and surrounding rural areas. Since the district is also the site of a large university and a private college, the schools are attended by large numbers of pupils from the homes of faculty and staff of the two institutions. During the period of the study, the school district had an annual pupil enrollment of approximately 7800 and a professional staff of 450. Annual budgeted appropriations ranged from approximately $8 million (1964–65) to $13 million (1971–72).

The community experienced many changes in its schools from 1965 to 1972. A new superintendent pressed a policy of decentralization in which individual schools were given substantial automony over programs and staffing. Learning centers were made the focus of programs in many elementary schools. A voluntary elementary school of an innovative nature was established, and a radically different junior high school was operated as an alternative. New schools were built, despite a running crisis over finance and taxes. Collective negotiations were instituted. Volunteers and paid aides entered the schools as staff assistants. The politics of school board elections were intensified. Strong factions, pro and con school policies, appeared. Like much of the rest of the country, the school district experienced a degree of student radicalism (especially affected by the proximity of the two higher-education institutions), strong demands from minority groups for equity, modifications in curriculum and organization, and the general sense of unrest that characterized this period. Even in the affairs of a moderate-size school district, the crisis of the Vietnam War influenced educational decision-making.

We will refer to this school district as the "Athens district" and the community as the "Athens community". The name is not inappropriate to a region which in location, physical surroundings, and major interests bears some resemblance to the ancient city state.

Table 1. *Knowledgeable individuals: roles in school district, 1965–72*

Role	*Number*
Superintendent of schools	1
Director of curriculum	1
Member, board of education	2
Principal, alternative junior high school	1
Principal, innovative elementary school	1
Teacher, alternative junior high school	3
University faculty member active in development of alternative junior high school	1
University staff member involved in civic and school affairs	1
Parent involved in planning for innovative elementary school	1
Parent involved in affairs of alternative junior high school	3

NATURE OF THE STUDY

The subject of this study was the Athens school district during a period of intensive and sometimes radical change. Our purpose was to find out through interviewing what a selected number of informed individuals and a selected sample of families thought about the school district and the changes taking place in the period 1965–72. Although we were interested in reactions to the entire school system and to all of the changes occurring, special emphasis was given to the innovative elementary school and the alternative junior high school. Interviewing took place shortly after the end of the 1965–72 period.

Using the oral history technique of asking open-ended questions and encouraging freedom of response, we conducted interviews with 15 individuals who were informed about and involved in some or all of the significant changes taking place in the district in this time period. Many of these individuals had helped to make decisions about one or more of the changes. These persons were selected on the basis of their knowledgeability about the school district and the change process. They will be referred to as "knowledgeables". Table 1 indicates the role in the Athens school district of each of these individuals during the 1965–72 period.

Similar interviews were conducted with 18 families, including both parents and children of school age. These families were consumers of school district services and affected directly or indirectly by the changes taking place. Often family members were also participants in the activities of individual schools. Families were selected, with help from school counselors, on the criteria of place of residence in the district, head of household's occupation, and schools attended by the children. This information is shown in table 2.

Each individual or family unit was interviewed separately and these conversations were recorded on tape. While the interviewer used a series of initial questions designed

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Table 2. *Families interviewed categorized by place of residence in the district, head of household's occupation, and schools attended by children*

Category	*Rural*			*Suburban*			*Urban*			*Total*
	Wage worker	*Business*	*Professional*	*Wage worker*	*Business*	*Professional*	*Wage worker*	*Business*	*Professional*	
Family units	3	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	2	18
Parents	6	1	1	1	5	2	6	5	3	30
Children	7	3	4	5	6	4	7	8	4	48
High school	5‡	1			2	1	1	6	3†	19
Junior high	2			1	4	1	1	2		11
Elementary				4		2	1			7
Innovative elementary			1				4		1	6
Alternative junior high			3							3
Parochial		2*						1		3

* *1 junior high, 1 elementary*

† *Two previously attended the alternative junior high.*

‡ *Three previously attended the alternative junior high.*

to start the discussion and to get at the topics about which opinions were sought, the oral history method was adhered to in that those interviewed were encouraged to speak freely and fully about matters of special concern to themselves. Knowledgeable individuals were asked to indicate under what conditions this interview data could be used by others. Families were promised that they would remain anonymous.

Before they began this project, the interviewers read all pertinent written materials concerning the school district and the changes of the 1965–72 period. These included school board minutes, the daily newspaper, school district newsletters, and other official and more informal position statements, proposals, and correspondence. The investigators used this written material, the oral tapes of families, and transcripts of other interviews as the data for this report.

VIEWS OF KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS

We wanted to know how each of these individuals viewed the period of change with respect to sources of leadership, other causes for the changes taking place, and the effects on the schools and the community. We also wanted to know what they thought about the two most distinctive of the new reforms — the innovative elementary school and the alternative junior high school — including sources of leadership, other causes for the schools' origins, effects of each school on other schools and the community, and special problems or issues resulting from the operation of these schools. Finally, we wished to know how those interviewed judged the effectiveness of communications between the schools and the public in this period of intensive change.

Leadership — The Superintendent

Most of those interviewed felt that the superintendent of schools had certain goals in mind, was favorable to certain kinds of educational development, and exerted leadership to achieve goals consistent with his ideas of growth. The superintendent was the chief change agent in the period 1965-72. In retrospect, the superintendent himself saw his chief goal as that of moving from centralized to decentralized governance of schools, with decision-making being transferred from central administration and the school board to individual school staffs and school communities. He saw himself as having worked consistently to accomplish this goal in matters of allocating funds, of delegating responsibility to administrators and teachers, developing programs of instruction, and setting school board agendas. In his view, the several key innovations in Athens during his time could be seen as part of a coherent pattern of change consistent with his overall goal of decentralization. He acknowledged his own leadership role while describing it as subtle and "low key". He was trying, he said, to persuade others to see the need for change and was willing to lead and take responsibility for it. The superintendent acknowledged that he had not been wholly successful, that some of his goals were misunderstood or misinterpreted, and that certain forceful groups in Athens School District determinedly opposed some of the changes.

Respondents agreed that the superintendent was the key to change. He was considered as progressive, responsive to needs, truly believing in alternatives in schooling, and wanting to have the public assume responsibility for public education. But appraisals of the superintendent's administrative competence and leadership ability varied widely. Some saw him as competent in management skills and de-

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tails; others regarded him as careless or casual in planning school board meetings or carrying out projects. Some characterized him as open and frank in his relationships with staff and public, but there were those who felt he was secretive or uncommunicative. He was looked upon by some as a bold leader and by others as a person who advocated innovation and then backed away from specific changes when the going got rough. A picture emerges of a leader whose goals and achievements were recognized but whose style of leadership, as he saw it, was either not recognized or not accepted by many of our respondents.

Leadership — Other Sources

Most respondents pointed to the remarkable leadership given by groups of parents and allied neighborhood residents in starting the innovative elementary school or to parental influence in keeping the alternative junior high school going during its stormy life. In both cases, parents studied, prepared supporting data, lobbied, helped in school activities, and were consistently supportive of their respective schools. The elementary school benefited from leadership given by some professional staff members of the school district and faculty from the local university. The innovative programs and methods of the school would not have been possible without such leadership. Respondents agreed that leadership for the alternative junior high school came from individuals and programs at the university and, indeed, that the inception of this school was largely the result of such leadership combined with the good will of the superintendent and the work and ideas of a few members of the teaching staff.

Significantly involved in leadership for change were a majority of the members of the school board, a group providing consistent support to the superintendent's goals and proposed changes and supporting parental and other requests for innovations. The effectiveness of this group was eroded during subsequent school board elections but it was able to muster sufficient power to keep the new developments going during the time period under study.

Respondents saw neither the teachers' association nor the regular organized parent groups as leading in the several major innovations of the 1965-72 period, though they recognized that individual teachers and special parent groups were particularly influential. Some organized groups, not directly concerned with education, such as taxpayers, took stands for or against policies that brought about change, and there was organized citizen action in behalf of slates of school board candidates. But none of these groups were cited as having provided significant leadership for change. Some respondents indicated that the district decision to join a cooperative education district, which absorbed some of the school system's programs and costs, contributed to the ability of the school district to accomplish some of its innovative activities.

Other Causes for Change

In addition to leadership, those interviewed identified several other reasons for the period of intensive alteration undergone by the Athens School System between 1967 and 1972.

The temper of the times

Several respondents cited nationwide influences as contributing to the local process of change in education. Schools tend to respond, albeit slowly sometimes, to societal pressures, and the demands for improvement were strong in this period. Schools were under pressure nationally to try new methods, to provide alternatives, to reach out to the people, to be more generally responsive to the needs of working class and disadvantaged groups. There were strong moves for decentralization and accountability. As several respondents noted, changes in Athens reflected changes on the national scene. Professionals, board members, and citizens, alike, hearing of new educational ventures, studied and pressed for reforms, and students in secondary schools joined in these demands. The personnel and resources for some new methods were in place; so changes were accomplished. Given leadership and sanction, new ideas already carried out in other communities or at least stressed in the literature — decentralization of control, elementary schools of a more open sort, alternative programs in secondary schools and others — were undertaken. Some of the persons interviewed believed that at best the school district was not especially innovative even during the period studied. Two respondents felt that the district did not, even in the face of local and national change, meet the needs of less advantaged groups.

Financial considerations

Running through the discussion of change as influenced by leadership and developments on the national scene is an interesting variant. Reforms in the school district were favored because they would be good business. Old buildings, soon to be discarded, could be used for experimental or innovative school programs, and these programs could be staffed by students and others as aides so that program costs would be no higher, and possible lower, than traditional programs. Federal funding could be obtained for some types of innovation, thus making it profitable to change (though the superintendent did not consider this a very important factor). New buildings, designed to be more open, turned out to be economical. Some respondents criticized the board and superintendent for stressing economy ahead of quality in instituting reforms.

Nature of the school community

Most of those interviewed saw the Athens community as a rather unusual one in the sense that such a large proportion of its population work in higher education. Much of the impetus for change came from college and

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university faculty members who were themselves interested in trying new programs and methods in a school setting. A sizable group of citizens knew about new educational techniques and approaches and were anxious to see one or another of them tried in their children's schools. During the academic year the community houses a large number of college students, many of whom want to work as volunteers or student teachers in the schools. The "free school" movement was developing in this period, and it had many advocates among young persons in the school district. The university had set up a special program to assist undergraduates in linking academic study with the community projects designed to assist disadvantaged groups. Respondents gave a picture of a community in which changes in the schools would find leadership, stimulus, and skilled help. And the schools themselves were, of course, used to instituting reforms in the interests of a rather demanding community.

Effects of Changes

We asked those interviewed what effects the changes had made in the Athens School System and how the system differed at the end of the period, 1972, from what it had been in 1965.

Educational organization and procedures

While varying in their perceptions of how much change had been accomplished and for whose benefit, most respondents agreed that the school system had improved during this period. Genuinely alternative programs were available, they reported, more people had become involved in educational decision-making, many elementary schools were giving children a more active part in learning, and both the amount and quality of educational discussion in the community had improved. Several cited the success of the innovative elementary school as an indication of true and constructive change; several saw the termination of the alternative junior high school (it was closed by an act of the board) as a setback to the improvement process. A few respondents raised questions about how real or lasting the recent additions would be, indicating that some groups in the community had not benefited, citing a growing conservatism on the school board, and wondering whether changes would hold up now that the superintendent had left. But the overall reaction was that the school system's organization, programs, and ways of working were better for the changes. Students and parents had more options, as well as the benefit of better techniques and approaches.

School–community relations

How did this period of intensive change affect the relations of the school system with its constituents? Those interviewed saw both benefits and losses. On the positive side they cited strong interest and participation by parents, especially those supporting the more innovative programs. They pointed to the increase in informal study groups, high attendance at school board meetings, and the increased number and quality of volunteer services to schools. Several felt that the superintendent had succeeded in getting neighborhood and parent groups to assume more responsibility for making decisions about education.

Stressing negative effects, respondents cited growing uneasiness in the community at the pace of change and a substantial dislike of some features of the more radical changes. They pointed to the election of board members committed to oppose some types of change, of vigorous and sometimes intemperate letters to the newspaper opposing changes, and of a general feeling by the citizenry that they were not kept adequately informed about what was taking place. One former board member stressed the controversial and poorly managed board of education meetings, attributing them to poor administrative preparation and leadership as well as to the type of changes being made. He indicated that board meetings of this kind were bound to cause citizens to lose respect for the schools. Respondents saw some of the changes as coming from or benefiting only a minority of the school population.

Several respondents pointed out that community reactions to the schools were influenced not only by local changes but by the national period of crisis (the Black revolution, student activism, anti-war sentiment). They reminded us that school programs and policies, especially the less conventional ones, could often become the target of community groups or individuals whose major targets were actually elsewhere. Some of those interviewed suggested that university staff members were active proponents of several of the more radical proposals, and that the university was always regarded with suspicion by certain elements of the Athens community.

A Special Case — The Innovative Elementary School

One neighborhood elementary school, slated for closing because enrollment had declined, was converted into a district-wide innovative school. It was staffed by a new kind of personnel that included many aides and volunteers, student initiative and individualization in the learning process were emphasized, and a close interaction of parents with the school was encouraged. The school had an "open" quality, abandoned many traditional classroom routines, encouraged freedom with responsibility, and sought a meaningful relation between school learning and the lives and interests of the learners. We asked the group of knowledgeable individuals about this school, the leadership involved, causes for its establishment, effects of the school, and any special problems encountered. Though several respondents knew little firsthand about this school,

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some of the others had been heavily involved in its formation.

Leadership

This innovative school was largely the result of leadership by a coalition of parents, neighborhood residents, and university specialists. The leadership exerted by the coalition was remarkable. Parents and residents studied newer approaches to elementary schooling carefully, worked with interested specialists, developed a school plan, and lobbied for it. Many neighborhood residents fought to retain the school, agreeing to keep their children in attendance. Other parents were willing to transport their children from outlying neighborhoods. Professional staff members volunteered for service to the school; there was a flood of citizen volunteers.

Other reasons for the school's beginning—

Respondents agreed that the new elementary school (a new program in an old building) was brought about by a fortunate combination of events. The school was slated for closing, yet having been somewhat modernized in recent years, a modicum of work could put it in usable condition. The times were right for new and innovative elementary school programs, and a number of university people were interested in trying them out. A core of neighborhood support for keeping the school was present. Parents and their allies provided strong and informed leadership. The superintendent, viewing this proposal as consistent with his aims, encouraged them, as did a majority of the school board who consistently supported reasonable changes. It looked as though the school might be operated at or perhaps below normal per pupil costs. The experimental nature of the proposed program might lead to closer relations between the school system and university interests, a goal some wished to achieve. Moreover there was a nation-wide ferment in elementary education with a number of programs and approaches already available for use. Some teachers and administrators of the Athens school district were ready to join in the venture. This coalition of interests and means was not as clear to participants at the time as it seemed in retrospect; now, however, several respondents saw it as happening this way.

Effects of the innovative elementary school

Since the school was in operation for several of the years covered by this study, we asked those interviewed how its operation had affected participants (students, parents, staff), the school district, and the community.

Participants. Respondents informed about the school felt that its effect on most of the pupils had been positive. They had enjoyed school more than in the past and profited from the open, individualized nature of the environment. Examples of youngsters who moved on successfully into secondary schools were cited. Many students came alive about learning and were extremely productive in an academic sense. A number of parents, also, were benefited by the school, being pleased with children's high morale and learning progress and feeling themselves closer to the school than they had been previously. Respondents indicated that the staff, while having a rather rocky and confusing first year, had settled down to enjoy the experience and to profit from it. Another description of the situation was that, after an initial trial, the staff worked out a successful pattern that enabled them to be both productive and happy. Most of them believed that the school owed much of its success to a competent administrator who worked well in an open-school setting.

The school district. Several respondents saw this experimental school as having been a significant and beneficial influence in elementary education in the district. Though they agreed that a direct cause-and-effect pattern could not be established, it was their view that a number of novel departures in other elementary schools of the district could be directly attributed to the initiation of new methods and approaches in the innovative school. Informants pointed out changes in staffing patterns, individualization of instruction, and greater freedom for learners as approaches that had been more readily adopted in other schools as a result of the work of this one.

The community. Several respondents made the point that an elementary school, even an unconventional one, does not attract very much community attention; it is largely a neighborhood concern. In a sense, then, this school was protected in its innovativeness by its character as a neighborhood venture, dealing with younger children and removed from direct responsibility for college preparation and certification, as well as from the more widespread concerns about adolescents.

Those interviewed thought that in general the school was well received by those members of the community cognizant of its aims and programs. After a volatile opening year, when staff were uncertain and youngsters somewhat undisciplined, the school avoided excessive public attention. Several respondents stressed that it takes time for such a school to settle down and accomplish its goals. Thus, they argued, a school district must agree to give innovations sufficient time for staff and pupils to adapt to new ways and test out novel ideas. This school did not have a stated period of existence. It was fortunate to survive long enough to solve many initial problems and begin to achieve desired results, despite having to justify itself annually to a board of education with some members who opposed the amount of freedom offered to pupils.

Special problems and issues. Some observers felt that the innovative elementary school had a special problem that is characteristic of such ventures. Certain new staff members, dedicated to their own goals of elementary education, engaged initially in "ego trips" and proved to be unresponsive to colleagues and pupils and indifferent to the needs of the school as a whole. It took time to shake down this staff, make replacements, and to bring the needs of

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pupils to center stage. This problem was largely resolved by time and administrative leadership.

Another special problem cited was the fact that the school district tried to operate this experiment as frugally as possible, forcing parents to provide transportation for their children, keeping the old building minimally maintained and serviced, and seeming to expect a bargain in terms of costs versus results. In part, this problem resulted from the insecure tenure of the school joined to a feeling that the schoolhouse itself was eventually going to be closed. Whatever the reasons, the frugality of the school district complicated the work of the school by keeping physical resources and support services to a minimum.

An important issue underlying the discussion of respondents was, Who controls the public schools? In reality this school was operated publicly in behalf of a group of parents who wished their children to attend this kind of school. Who should determine the nature of schooling — families, or the state, in this case in the person of a school district? This key issue is very much the center of nationwide debate. While the issue did not surface in debate about the school, it seemed to underlie the arguments for and against an experiment of this sort.

An Extraordinary Case — The Alternative Junior High School

A genuinely alternative secondary school, initiated largely by university interests, was accepted as a public junior high school by the Athens board of education and operated during the closing part of the 1965-72 period. This school, accepting only students volunteered by their families and heavily staffed with college students as teaching assistants, was a "free school" in the sense that students had a maximum degree of freedom in planning and choosing their own programs and activities. In life style the school reflected many of the values and characteristics of the period of student activism. Controversial, unconventional, highly praised by its supporters and damned by its opponents, the school was closed shortly after the period under study. We asked the persons interviewed about the leadership involved in getting this school started and maintained, as well as other reasons for the school's inception. We asked about effects of the school on students and staff, on the school system and the community. Finally, we sought ideas about special problems and issues created by this sort of school. All but one or two of the respondents were acquainted with this school. Especially well informed were former staff members and principal of the school.

Leadership

Respondents largely agreed that the initial leadership came from a coalition of university staff members and students who wished to participate in a free secondary school along the lines suggested by Kozol, Holt, Kohl, and others during this period. This coalition formed one wing of a new university program designed to tie campus undergraduate study to field projects in the form of community service. Several of those interviewed noted the leadership ability of a core of students who worked up a proposal, redrafted it under criticism, helped recruit staff, worked with board of education members, and themselves became staff members in the school.

A few respondents saw initial leadership as generated by the superintendent, who convened several meetings for interested members of his staff and university proponents of an alternative secondary school. Though these meetings do in fact seem to have been the genesis of the movement, the university group appears to have quickly assumed leadership.

Other reasons for the school's beginning.

How did such a radical departure come to be undertaken by a public school district? Again, respondents make it clear that, as in the case of the elementary school, a combination of circumstances worked in favor of this unusual move. It was a time of ferment and reform in American education, and free schools (most of them private) were springing up widely. College students, radicalized by opposition to the Vietnam War, were looking for ways to work constructively in support of groups they saw as victimized by society. Some teachers and administrators were anxious to release schooling from its lockstep qualities. So the proposal for a radically different sort of junior high school came at a time when many persons were receptive to the idea.

In this case, respondents pointed out, other things were working in favor of such a change. The superintendent supported innovative plans, saw this one as coinciding with his goals of decentralization and greater user control of the schools, and welcomed it as a means for closer cooperation with the university. He and his associates also saw the plan as potentially receiving financial support from university and similar sources and as a way to extensively involve college student volunteers in the schools. A progressive wing of the school board approved the new school in principle and as a possible way to both improve morale and economize. Among members of the teaching staff was a small but dedicated core of individuals who wanted to participate in a free-school enterprise.

Missing as influences in starting this school were favorably minded parents (who only later assumed a leadership role), organized teachers, or citizen groups. Though some individuals were interested or willing to participate in an alternative school, the Athens community at large seemed unaware of the events that made the alternative junior high school part of its school system. In retrospect, respondents saw this unawareness as a serious problem in a later period when the school became a center of public controversy. Citizens could argue that the school was "put over on" the community without open discussion.

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Effects of the alternative junior high school

This unusual secondary school was from start to finish a *cause célèbre* in the school district. Thus we asked the informed individuals how they viewed its effects on participants (students, staff and parents), on the school system, and on the community and especially on school–community relations.

Participants. Those respondents closest to the alternative school were nearly unanimous in the belief that the students profited greatly from this experience. All students attended on a voluntary basis, and most of them were reported to have had very high morale, done a number of creative projects, developed a responsible independence, and enjoyed school much more than they had previously. It was pointed out that most students made nearly normal progress in studies and were above average in creativity and attitude toward school, as measured by tests and other instruments for analysis. Respondents agreed that a minority of students, usually already in trouble in previous schooling, failed to respond to the unstructured environment, and that these students caused the school a great deal of difficulty.

Some respondents, not so close to the school, thought that students would have gained more from the experience if the school had been better led and staffed. One or two stressed the fact that it recruited from middle-class homes and that these children could cope with any sort of schooling, structured or not. Thus, the school could not claim to have helped this group of pupils. One respondent was especially critical of the failure of the school to recruit children from working-class and minority families or to deal successfully with those few who were there.

The interviewers got the overall impression that for able, fairly independent youngsters from middle-class homes, who were disaffected with traditional schooling, this alternative school was a very successful experience, one that enabled them to get a new liking for school and to move on successfully into a more traditional high school. For other youngsters, however, the effects appear to have been more diverse.

Both the professional and volunteer staff members were dedicated to this free school and to the aims and methods they had hammered out so carefully in the planning period. Their morale was high, they worked very hard, and they gave thoughtful attention to each individual student. Informed respondents believed that the staff enjoyed and profited from the school experience even though they frequently found it burdensome and trying.

Respondents provided a good deal of testimony about the difficulties encountered by staff. Planning had been cloaked in the rhetoric of the free-school movement but, when confronted by students and the need for organization, they found the plans incomplete and impractical. Staff members had to improvise courses, programs, schedules, counseling, play activities, almost everything. In the first year, little administrative leadership was offered either by the appointed administrator, who turned to the school system for help, or by anyone else in authority. Since both professionals and volunteers were to some degree on "ego trips", it was hard to build a teaching team out of individualists each bent on doing his own thing.

Moreover, staff members soon sensed how isolated they were from the community, or the other schools, and even from university faculty members who had encouraged their participation. As opponents of the school began to publicly attack it, the staff gradually came to see the school, their creation, as vulnerable and threatened by outsiders. This was hard on morale, on the quality of teaching, and on the pupils who were themselves having troubles in community relations. Most respondents stressed that staff morale was better in the later period when a strong administrator was brought in.

After the opening months of the school, parents organized and became a potent force by influencing goals and standards and defending the school against community and school board opposition. Parents had an exhilarating albeit harrassing experience with this alternative school; for some of them, free schooling and this particular school became articles of faith. Most respondents agreed that the parents were highly successful for a time and that it was an impressive experience to see them so constructively involved in their children's education.

The school system. How did the operation of this unusual school affect the school system? Those interviewees who professed to know the school were not entirely clear on this point. Some felt that the central administration was influenced by both the successes and problems of the new school, and they had evidence that a proposal for a somewhat different alternative secondary school was being drawn up at the time of this study. Although one of the two other junior high schools of the Athens district, which saw itself as a reasonably open school, seemed to be positively influenced by the alternative school, the other junior high school was not. The high school staff, busy with innovations of their own and reasonably conservative by inclination (the school is college preparatory in emphasis), was cool to the alternative junior high. Immersed in the opening stages of mandated collective negotiations, the teachers' association saw the new school's staffing patterns (many volunteers – few professionals) as a threat to their negotiating demands. There was relatively little give-and-take between the alternative school and the rest of the system; this was in some contrast to the role of the innovative elementary school.

How much of the isolation of the alternative junior high was due to its unique characteristics is hard to judge. Respondents attributed part of the problem to the radical lifestyle assumed by staff and students, to the school's overwhelming problems in just staying afloat, as well as to the fact that it tended to be identified as a university project rather than a genuine unit of the system.

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To the board of education, the school was a challenge, seen by some members as a useful way to give parents and children a genuine alternative. Other board members, and a growing number over time, came to see the school as divisive to the community, a burden to the board, and a poor idea in any event. Thus the board became increasingly divided over the merits of the school, even though they kept it alive on an annual basis. The superintendent, consistent with his goal of letting concerned parties make decisions and take the consequences, tended to blow hot and cold on the school, depending on how things went.

The community. Whatever their own views on the merits of the alternative junior high school, most respondents saw the school as controversial in the community and creating problems in school–community relations. Most of those interviewed thought the experiment valuable enough to justify the intense public debate it caused; some thought the debate itself a useful thing. Respondents agreed that alternative forms of schooling should be available in the district and that responsible public demands for alternatives should be gratified. Several persons were disappointed that the school was closed (after 1972), and also thought it unfortunate that alternatives of other sorts for other groups were not available.

This junior high school seemed destined from its beginning to be controversial and to invite attack. Both college student staff and pupils proudly espoused the goals and lifestyles of the high period of student activism, an affront to conservative citizens. Some persons in the community looked with suspicion upon the sponsor program in the university. Freedom was stressed in the school, which meant that students chose to study or not, the curriculum was informal and shifting, and many students were seen at large during school hours. Many critics saw these students as behavior problems. Located in the heart of a working-class neighborhood, this group of middle-class "radicals" were especially unpopular in their immediate locale. Even though the school shaped up as time went on, developing more structure in curriculum and a better-disciplined organization, the initial impressions lasted. Rumors exceeded truth in gossip about the school. More conservative persons saw it as a reflection of all of the problems of a society in crisis. And, as respondents pointed out, the school did very little to correct this image. Its behavior was inward turning, its public relations were poor, interaction with other schools was minimal, and some students took part in acts judged by the community to be improper, if not illegal.

The interviewees stressed that much worthwhile learning took place in the school that parents and pupils were extremely satisfied with the experience, and that the anti-social behavior of some students was similar to what students in other schools did. Despite these positive aspects, however, a portion of the school community regarded it as an unfortunate experiment.

Midway in the schools' existence, new board members were elected who had announced opposition to this experiment. The superintendent, despite his theoretical support for an innovation of this type, wavered on the question of continuance. The school was continued on an annual basis as parents, staff, and some citizens fought hard for its survival. But later, faced with repeated legal action by a single citizen, a new superintendent and his board closed the school, an action that most of the respondents felt was both premature and unfortunate.

Special problems and issues. As those interviewed pointed out, the alternative junior high school had come upon the scene too quickly and largely at the initiative of university groups. It lacked a solid base of support in the community except among some staff and school board members. Thus defense of the school, when it needed it, had to come from the participants – staff, students, parents – and these defenders were looked upon as special pleaders. It would have been wise, said respondents, to have devoted more time and effort to building a support base before the school opened.

This alternative school, like the innovative elementary school, had to operate on a shoestring. Its building was old, its professional teaching staff minimal, and its special services (counseling, physical education) hard to obtain. It was housed in a wretched building which, while it suited some of its participants, was inadequate for educational use. Moreover, the school was on an annual renewal basis which gave it little chance to make long-term staffing arrangements or build a permanent program. As its students were volunteers, it was annually forced to recruit, thus adding to its image of instability.

Finally, as respondents pointed out, the school had not yet proved itself (though it seemed to be gaining stability and strength) when the temper of the times changed, a more conservative mood hit country and community, and it was possible to muster at least token support for closing the school.

This educational change, like the innovative elementary school, tested the issue of who controls public education – users (parents and their children) or the state in the person of a school district. Those interviewed were almost unanimous in believing that users are entitled to those alternatives in public schooling that they choose. But most of them reflected on the difficulties involved in carrying this theory into practice. The alternative junior high school, advertised as serving all who chose to come, ended up by primarily serving an advantaged, middle-class group of children. So critics could claim that the public should not be responsible for supporting the school with tax dollars. But this experiment also encountered the practical difficulty of how far a public institution can depart from social norms. Both in behavior and educational activities the school was pretty far from traditional. While in theory an innovative school should try different methods and pro-

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grams and show different forms of learning behavior, the plain fact seems to be that such departures from the norm quickly invite public criticism. And unless there is a good basis of support and an agreed-upon tenure and funding for the experiment, it will have trouble in surviving.

Communications

It seemed pertinent to ask this group of knowledgeable persons, many of them decision-makers or participants in the changes taking place in the Athens School System, what they thought of the effectiveness of communications in the school district in this period of intensive change. Did school people communicate effectively with citizens about the goals underlying changes, about specific changes, and about the effects of these changes? Did individual schools, especially those where innovations were taking place, communicate effectively with patrons, explaining developments, their purposes, and desired effects? Did professionals and school board members listen carefully to citizens as they asked, complained, requested, or proposed?

Responses were varied. On the positive side, respondents pointed to open board meetings, formal newsletters, numerous public meetings, extensive newspaper coverage, many letters to the editor, and active parent participation as evidences of attempts to communicate. Some thought that individual school innovations were better described to the public than were system-wide changes. There was divided opinion as to whether the superintendent had effectively communicated his goals for decentralization and greater local autonomy and power. But many of those interviewed, themselves part of the change-making group, felt that they had done all they could to explain, listen, and respond.

There were some negative reports on the effectiveness of communications. Several respondents knew almost nothing about changes other than the one in which they took part – an interesting comment on the success of system-wide communications. Others stressed that segments of the public had misunderstood or not understood goals and actions of the school system. The professional staff itself was described as poorly informed about innovations going on in its midst. Many respondents argued that neither the innovative elementary school nor the alternative junior high school had been adequately advertised before their inception or sufficiently discussed publicly when in operation. Some respondents pointed to cases where announced goals had been thwarted in practice, with little acknowledgement of this fact. Several called attention to angry or confused public school board meetings where board members were not well informed in advance, passions outran reasoned argument, and it was obvious that the communications process was poor.

Quite apart from good or poor communications, stated some respondents, was the matter of preconceptions concerning certain controversial types of educational change. Schooling is very close to the hopes and interests of citizens: If a change in schooling is deemed to be bad for one's child, for the well-being of the community, or for one's own economic position, then the best communications effort in the world will not help much. It seems likely that in this school district during this period of change, some battle lines were drawn on an emotional or ideological basis, with little chance for reasonable compromise or even sensible discussion. This does not excuse faulty communications by school officials, say respondents, but it does point to the magnitude of the problem. One respondent insisted that the educational changes did not meet the needs of less-advantaged families, or were not even known to them.

So there emerged a mixed picture of communications but one suggesting a serious need for improvement.

VIEWS OF FAMILIES

Eighteen family interviews were conducted on Saturdays or during early evening hours when the greatest number of family members would be able to participate. A total of 30 parents and 48 children were interviewed in sessions varying in length from 30 minutes to 2½ hours. Most families were interviewed as a unit with everyone participating at will in the discussion of the school system. (See table 2, p. 3 for information about the families.)

Most family members seemed interested in the project and willing, if not eager, to express their various opinions about the Athens School System and the changes that had occurred between 1965 and 1972.

We asked family members to assess the leadership given by the superintendent and the school board during the period of change. We asked them what they thought of the school system, how they rated it, what were its strengths, weaknesses, and special characteristics. We were especially interested in their views about the innovative elementary school and the alternative junior high school. We wished to know if they thought communications between themselves and the school system (or individual schools) were effective or, if not, why. Another concern of ours was whether reactions to changes in the schools varied from family to family depending on socioeconomic level (judged in this case by father's occupation), place of residence in the Athens community, and schools attended by children.

In reporting on family reactions, the family will be reported as a unit where it shared like opinions about the schools and the changes occurring. When children and parents were in marked disagreement, the differences will be described. Family members are occasionally reported as segments of the total group.

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Leadership — The Superintendent

Fourteen of the 18 families viewed the superintendent as a major influence on change in the school district, acknowledging his leadership role. Of these, 10 families thought the superintendent was an effective leader, 4 families denied this, and 4 families were uncertain. Opinions expressed, whether positive or negative, were strongly voiced. Family members viewing the superintendent as a good leader saw him as honest and open, democratic, innovative in disposition, and a major force in the district during the change period. Some pointed out how he had overcome serious financial troubles facing the schools. Critics viewed him as attempting too many changes too rapidly, fiscally irresponsible, poor in public relations, and inefficient in his management of district affairs.

Leadership — Board of Education

Most families perceived the school board as a hard-working group, dedicated to community service, and contending with serious divisions in the community over changes in schooling. While the board of education and its individual members were not explicitly described as leaders, comments made it evident that the board was credited with some of the leadership offered during the 1965-1972 period. A few negative comments were made; some saw the board as unrepresentative of the community, as financially irresponsible, or as a "rubber stamp" to the superintendent.

Views About the School System

Family members were asked about their views of the school system, being encouraged to talk about these fully and without special directions. Since interviews were conducted shortly following the 1965-1972 period, interviewers were seeking evaluations of the Athens schools during this period of change.

When asked how they rated the school system, families voiced a number of opinions ranging from "not very good" to "better than many" to "good, but . . . ," to "very good". Most persons who rated the school district as good seemed to be comparing it with other school districts that they knew or with their general notion of public schools in the United States; those who considered the system not so good seemed to view the question more narrowly, that is, in terms of what could be improved in this particular school system. There was a much stronger positive sentiment toward the district elementary schools than toward the junior high and high schools. Many family members saw the quality of schooling varying from teacher to teacher within the same school. This was emphasized many times; the quality of children's school experiences was strongly influenced by the particular teacher(s) they worked with from year to year.

The strengths of the school system were often described by parents as lying in programs offered at the high school or in the neighboring cooperative school system where students went for special kinds of schooling. Both college preparatory and occupational education programs were viewed as providing a sound training for children. The many honors and awards earned by students at Athens High were cited as evidence of the high quality of education in that school.

Differences of opinion were evident on the question as to *why* the high school had such a good record of awards and college admissions. About half of the families interviewed considered the high school's record to be the direct result of good teaching and administration. The others stressed that it was the result of a disproportionately high number of especially able children attending the high school (pupils from families affiliated with the local college and university).

Another strength viewed with some ambivalence by both parents and children was the amount of independent study time and activities available in the schools. Independence was seen as valuable and a trait to be encouraged. However, many children and parents saw the schools as geared too much toward the student who has already developed the ability to work with minimal guidance and external structure. There was widespread agreement that opportunities to chose between teacher-led and independent study need to be available.

A lack of discipline was frequently mentioned as a problem of the Athens school district; a number of children as well as parents cited a need for more discipline in the schools. Lacking in classroom and in schools generally, they reported, was sufficient order, enough group cohesiveness, and the external direction to make efficient study possible. Several children commented on the lack of self-direction on the part of fellow students as well as a rather widespread alienation from school goals and norms. "The kids don't care" was the way they usually expressed it. Parents, contrasting their children's schooling with their own, cited a current lack of discipline as the reason that basic skills are not taught as thoroughly as in their day.

This feeling that the schools aren't teaching certain of the basic skills adequately was seen as the direct result of too much use of instructional methods that rely heavily on student self-direction. The children agreed with their parents that these instructional methods were often inappropriate, being geared to the able child, requiring too much independence, or assuming study habits and abilities that many children do not have.

The feeling that Athens High School was not fulfilling the needs of the non-college-bound children of the district

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seemed pervasive among the parents and high school pupils interviewed. Although several parents praised the occupational education program, many others felt that job-training opportunities were inadequate. These families saw the school system's concern for quality academic achievement to be detrimental to the educational needs of those children who are not potential scholars.

Extra-curricular activities were also viewed as favoring the most able students. Only one family, however, seemed to blame the school system for this situation. The description of athletic and music organizations requiring superior ability for membership was seen as inevitable in a community where children often start training in these skills at an early age. A number of parents and children deplored this situation, pointing out that there was no opportunity for a not particularly competent child to participate in these activities for the fun of it.

The families interviewed conveyed a generally positive attitude toward the school system, in spite of its faults. However, the investigators sensed a feeling in some working-class families that although their children were attending an undeniably strong school system, they were not reaping the benefits of it.

The Innovative Elementary School

Fourteen families (23 parents and 38 children) had not had first-hand experience with the innovative elementary school and of these, 11 parents and 9 children had no opinions about the school. The rest had varied opinions based on what they had heard or read. Those questioning the value of the innovative school thought it was too lax and permissive. Some parents described the school as a disorganized place where little learning occurred and considered a "special" school unnecessary. Others thought that the school had started out in a disorganized way but had improved over the years. Very few children had negative comments about the school. Most children and many parents saw the innovative school as a place where individual attention and instruction were available in a small place, with a friendly environment. They found the curriculum exciting and the setting creative.

The 4 families with children at the innovative elementary school were enthusiastic about the opportunities offered there. The children enjoyed school and reported a number of excellent learning experiences. Parents seem to be involved in their children's school experiences and to appreciate the warmth and personal concern of the staff toward their children. These parents discussed the changes that had occurred in the school since its inception. They described the difficulties involved in attempting freedom in school. They appreciated the work school faculty had done to achieve a balanced structure that guides children and still allows them choice and a chance to pursue special interests. The generally positive feelings parents expressed were marred by only one negative reaction. The school, some said, is too homogeneous, drawing too heavily on middle-class families for its pupil population.

With only a few dissenters, those who expressed opinions seemed to support the innovative elementary school. It was viewed as at least as productive as any of the other neighborhood elementary schools in the district, and a number of respondents saw it as a positive influence in the school system. Even those who did not agree with the school goals and activities seemed to support the idea that this neighborhood school should continue to exist. The families seemed to have a very high regard for the value of small elementary schools. The expense of keeping this one open was seen as justified.

The Alternative Junior High School

Children from 3 of the families had attended the alternative junior high school (8 had attended the school, but only 3 were actually enrolled at the time of the interviews). The conflict in the community over the school was sufficiently widespread so that nearly everyone interviewed had opinions about it.

When asked what they knew about the school, most parents and students described it as a small school for students who were not getting along in the regular junior highs. They knew it had a high adult-to-student ratio and featured small groups and individualized instruction. Parents and students alike described the curriculum as experimental and covering an unusually large number and variety of topics. The school was seen as successful in holding students who would have otherwise been dropouts.

Six of the 30 parents interveiwed considered the alternative junior high school a detriment to the school system. Their chief argument was that a lack of organization created an environment in which students were encouraged to shirk responsibility for their actions and neglect academic work; they saw the students' behavior as unruly and infringing on neighborhood and community rights. Some sentiment was expressed that the university affiliation was somehow harmful, probably because of the radical image of college students prevalent in the early 1970s. The third issue raised by opponents was that they could not justify the alternative junior high as a public school, because of its "special" nature and the probability that it cost more to operate than the regular junior high schools. The only advantage they saw to having the school was that it removed "undesirables" from other schools.

The issue of costs was important to parents who considered the alternative junior high as worthwhile. Many families who viewed alternatives in education as enriching children's opportunities did not think that they ought to create additional expenditures for the school district. The costs of the alternative junior high school were a source

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of confusion and ambivalence among and within families. Those who did not see the school as costing more used this as one reason why it should be maintained. Those who thought it was costing more were not sure what the exact expense was, but assumed that an "extra" school must certainly cost extra money. Some families felt that the advantages of an alternative were worth some extra expenses (e.g., they advocated use of district transportation to the school). Most families, however, were willing to support alternative schools only when they cost the same as other schools in the district.

Families expressed concern that the alternative junior high was inadequately linked to the other units of the school system. Would its graduates be able to get credit for their work when they entered the Athens High School? Though the school itself grew more stable over time, they reported, it did not seem to build stable relationships with the other secondary schools.

An issue that was never resolved was the composition of the student population. Care was taken in the beginning to have a heterogeneous population from all social classes. However, when the school came under attack, working-class parents were uncomfortable and anxious lest their children suffer from an inadequate education. By the last year of its existence, the school was attended largely by children from the upper middle class, leading one parent to characterize it as a "private school for professors' kids, operating on public funds".

Both families using and not using the alternative school agreed that students had spent school time poorly in the early stages of its history. Some considered this a result of inadequate planning, teaching, and administration. Because the school seemed to be a good environment for some students and a poor one for others, some thought it an admissions problem that could be solved by more careful selection of students. However, other family members regarded the confusion and regrouping of the early years as necessary and even desirable. Having to start from scratch, make mistakes, and reorganize was a good learning experience, they believed.

The school's strongest supporters suggested ways to strengthen it. They and even some of the less enthusiastic observers agreed that it took time to get a new school program going. Many urged that an innovative school of this sort be given enough time to reform and improve, before expecting desirable results. Should the alternative junior high have been closed (as it was at about the time of these interviews)? Most families said no, that the school needed more time to prove itself.

Why had the alternative junior high school been such a controversial institution in the Athens community? Why had it aroused such strong feelings pro and con? Since most family members supported the idea of alternatives in education, whatever their views about this school, it seemed important to ask these questions about the most distinct alternative in the Athens school district.

The school had somehow got off to a bad start, respondents said. The wrong public image was created early. Poor pupil conduct in the conservative school neighborhood was cited as one reason. Both parents and children mentioned that pupils and college student assistants had a radical lifestyle. And the school seemed to do little to counter its poor image; it was as proud of this image as it was of its innovative goals and programs.

Pointing out that it is normal for people to resist changes that come too fast and are too sweeping, several family members suggested that the alternative junior high would have had better success in the community if it had been planned more gradually and had moved more slowly in its new programs and methods.

Both parents and children stressed the small size and isolation of the alternative school as contributing to its controversial nature. Many of the problems of this special school, such as unruly conduct, occasional reports of drug use, heavy truancy, some failures in a new curriculum, were also problems in the other district schools. But what happened in this new, small, and different school was closely watched by citizens and especially opponents.

Also mentioned as responsible for the controversial nature of the school were the legal actions of one determined opponent, the school's weak administration, the "private school" image, and the belief that a special school is a financial burden.

Communications

We asked family members whether communications between themselves and the school district and individual schools were effective. Do school personnel listen to parents? Do they listen to children? Do the schools do a safisfactory job of explaining what they are doing?

All of the families agreed that school personnel were willing to take time for parent conferences. Parents' opinions varied widely as to how effective these conferences were. Eight of the 18 families thought that the conferences were helpful and that school staff tried to respond to parental views and to meet legitimate needs. Three of the 8 families qualified this view somewhat, reporting that experience varied from school to school, or that there was a tendency for school personnel to listen carefully to supporters but not to critics.

Ten of the 18 families were dissatisfied with parent–school-staff conferences. Many regarded them as a mere formality. School personnel, they reported, listen but do not seriously respond or do anything about the problems or needs cited by parents. They were especially critical of the counseling services.

Two parents emphasized the responsibilities of parents in becoming involved in school affairs, stating that many parents who reported difficulties in communications were themselves to blame.

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In responding to the question, "Do the school personnel listen to you?", children varied widely in their responses. Some reported that pupils were listened to but not very seriously. Others felt that school staff listen only to a vocal and aggressive minority of pupils. Some children had experienced disappointing results in trying to talk with school staff; others reported a number of cases where individual or group conferences with administrators or teachers had resulted in actions beneficial to pupil interests.

Only 4 of the 18 families interviewed seemed completely satisfied with the manner in which the schools and the school system explained changes, new procedures, or daily routines. Many family members stressed a tendency of the schools to explain things only after the fact and not in the planning or inception stages of new developments. Several people thought that individual schools did a good job of explaining but that the school system as a whole did not. Some respondents, stressing the two-way nature of effective communications, argued that many families do not listen very well to what school personnel try to explain.

While these reactions to school–family communications are limited in scope and drawn from a small sample, they describe a less-than-successful communications program in a school system that had been undergoing rapid and sometimes radical changes.

COMPARISON OF VIEWS OF THE TWO GROUPS

The two groups interviewed were chosen as representing quite different segments of the school district. The knowledgeable individuals were in positions to influence decisions made within the school system or to have a close view of the change process. The families' reactions were more likely to be based on the point of view of consumers of the schools' services. Although the two groups shared attitudes about some aspects of change in the Athens school district, their reactions to certain other points varied as much within, as between, groups. But on several issues, the two groups differed markedly, according to their different perspectives as determined by their various roles.

Causes of Change

Both groups considered the superintendent of schools to be the predominant influence on the changes that occurred in the school district. However, he believed that the role of superintendent was, and should be, disappearing and acted upon this belief by inconspicuously diminishing his own power and authority. Others did not share his view, either because they didn't understand his idea or because they didn't think that his actions were determined on that basis. Whether the policies enacted under the superintendent's aegis were judged as beneficial or as harmful, the school community felt that they were the result of his goals and leadership.

The knowledgeables considered the school board to be influential on change; they cited the altered composition of the board as affecting the pace of change and knew a good deal about citizen involvement in school board elections. These individuals tended to downgrade the influence of teacher and parent organizations and to see individual teachers or principals, as well as special parent groups connected with the innovative elementary school and the alternative junior high school, as being particularly influential.

In contrast, family members tended to regard the school board members as working hard and having a difficult job but not especially influencing change or policy. Some thought the board did what it was told to do by the superintendent; others felt that it represented only certain interests in the community. Family members did not see themselves as having much leverage in the school system, though middle-class families expressed a stronger sense of influencing decisions than did working-class families. Families talked relatively little about the effect of organized groups, though a number of individuals cited the pressure of a single citizen in the closing of the alternative junior high school.

Whereas the knowledgeable individuals frequently discussed comparative costs as affecting school district policies and changes, family members rarely stressed this point. Both groups mentioned national trends and local conditions stimulating change, although the family members stressed these matters less than the more broadly informed decision-making group.

Effects of Change

Though both groups tended to regard the school district as improved by the changes of the 1965-72 period, the knowledgeables were more positive about the value of such additions as alternative or innovative schools. Family members supported the need for more alternatives or choices in schooling; but many of them stressed the point that independent study and opportunities for greater freedom are not good for all pupils. High school students were especially concerned lest freedom for students degenerate into license or "goofing off". Some of them thought that alternatives should include various kinds of structured learning situations as well as independent study options.

Knowledgeables saw the period of change as valuable in stimulating discussion of school affairs in the Athens community. They cited the participation of citizens in the work of the innovative schools, increased attendance at school board meetings, and a growing number of volunteers as evidences of greater interest. Several individuals commended the trend toward greater responsibility by neighborhood groups for their own elementary schools.

Controversy over innovative schools or new programs was seen as essentially healthy because it got the community to think carefully about the aims and nature of public education. Although families were in general accord with these views, some expressed concern that too much attention to the alternative junior high school had taken community attention away from the affairs of the larger school system.

Parents felt they had more influence on the neighborhood elementary schools than on the junior highs and high school. Some parents who regarded their children's elementary school experience as successful were dissatisfied with the secondary schools. Parents recognized that they were less involved in the lives of their teenagers than they had been when the children were younger, still they expressed a need to know more about what takes place in the secondary schools.

The Innovative Elementary School

Both groups seemed to generally agree that the innovative elementary school was a success. Even its most serious critics conceded that it had improved over the years and appeared to be functioning adequately. Both groups considered its existence to be healthy influence on the other schools. While families tended to think the innovative elementary school was chiefly justified as a neighborhood school and a source of new ideas, knowledgeables regarded it as a more or less permanent alternative in the district's school program.

The Alternative Junior High School

Both groups thought of this school as chiefly useful for children not functioning optimally in the existing schools. The alternative school was acknowledged to stimulate able students who had been bored with the usual school experience. It was the opinion of one group of parents and students (not always in family units) that the school was a place for children who were trouble-makers and disruptive to the smooth working of the regular junior highs. They regarded the alternative school students as potential drop-outs who were temporarily enticed to remain in the system by an environment in which the constraints were minimal. This attitude was usually coupled with a feeling that it was good to have those nuisances out of the way. In contrast, other parents and students thought that pupils had not been selected carefully enough. The alternative school had been troubled by disruptive students, who nevertheless seemed to have benefited more from this open situation than from previous school experiences.

Many mentioned inadequate planning as a problem of the alternative junior high school. Informed individuals emphasized the lack of administrative leadership during its opening phase. They tended to focus their attention on the internal workings of the school and what these lacked. The families were more concerned with the lack of integration of this school into the rest of the school system. There were reports of alternative students not getting high school credit for ninth grade. Families resented the poor organization that allowed this to happen and put the blame on the central administration of the school district.

Communications

The variety of opinions about the amount and effectiveness of communications between citizens and the school system are indicative of the difficulties inherent in this process. There was some consensus that the school system tries to listen to and inform parents. That it is often not effective in such efforts was attributed by some to lack of parental interest. Others seemed to think that the school personnel either did not want an exchange of ideas or did not know how to initiate it. The quality of communications seemed to vary a great deal from school to school, from issue to issue, and from family to family. The view of some families that the school staff listened attentively but did not use the information in making decisions was denied by many of the knowledgeable respondents. They portrayed the school system as more directly responsive and responsible to the community than many parents considered it to be. But some of this group believed that the schools responded only to influential segments of the community.

STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNERS

The findings of this study, though limited by the single case used and the method of gathering the information, suggest certain strategies that education planners ought to keep in mind. If changes in the public school system – especially controversial ones – are planned, our evidence strongly suggests that it is essential to adopt such strategies for the protection of student, school, and community interests alike. These suggestions are made primarily to local planners and decision-makers – school administrators, boards of education, teachers, and advisory committees – but they also apply in some measure to those planning educational changes for broader regions.

General Acceptance of Alternatives

Contrary to a rather widespread view that educational change is accepted grudgingly, this study indicates that in at least one community most persons contacted accepted

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the need for alternatives in schooling. While not necessarily wanting certain changes for themselves or their families, they conceded the right of parents and children to have educational programs and methods suitable to their interests. Most respondents accepted even the radical changes involved in the operation of a free secondary school; that is, they felt these changes to be appropriate if a responsible group of parents wanted them for their own children and if the changes would not cost more tax dollars than other programs. Only a few persons interviewed objected to some changes on ideological grounds and would have denied them to all citizens. Our findings suggest a deep commitment to the principle that parents, and not the state, have the ultimate right to choose the form of their children's education, that public schools can try a number of alternative programs to serve different interests, and that a flow of public funds to support reasonable alternatives is justified. Different respondents attached different restrictions or limitations to their acceptance of alternatives or changes. But the consensus was that changes acceptable to responsible groups of families, to be used by those families and not forced on others, were appropriate within the public school system.

We suggest to educational planners that proposed innovations or alternatives not be discarded on the untested assumption that the school community will not accept them. Indeed, we recommend that public acceptance be assumed until evidence is given that the contrary is true. Perhaps a good first step is to carefully test public opinion about a proposed change to see what the community's inclinations are.

Need for Careful Prior Planning

It may seem unnecessary to suggest prior planning for educational changes; this may be assumed to be an essential condition. Yet in the school district under study, many respondents felt that changes had been made too quickly, sometimes even handled behind the scenes, that the initiative had come from a small group who had not consulted with segments of the public or the professional staff, and that this indifference to the opinions of other concerned persons weakened the chance for the success of an innovation of change. The case of the alternative junior high school was often cited as one in which enthusiastic proponents had won acceptance of a major change, almost before the public was aware of what was going on. A number of respondents argued that this school had little community support because people felt that it had not been presented for their approval before it was opened.

We recommend that proposed changes of a significant or sensitive nature be reported fully to the school district public at each stage in the planning process. A systematic way of obtaining citizen reactions is necessary; the importance of listening to and profiting from these reactions cannot be stressed too much. If a change is being instituted at the behest of one particular group in the community, this group needs to be carefully assessed to be sure that it is resourceful, responsible, and justified in its requests. The professional staff of the school system should be closely involved in the planning, and their views given serious consideration. There should be evidence of enough professional commitment and expertise to make the proposed change work. This step appeared to be lacking in establishing the two innovative schools in the district under study.

Now it may be argued that the laborious process we encourage is well designed to prevent any change at all, that such careful testing of proposals in advance is bound to uncover opposition of a sufficient weight to discourage the attempt to change. We acknowledge this as a risk. But the experience of this study tells us that citizens are more ready to accept change than might be assumed, and that, armed with sufficient information and satisfied as to their reasonable doubts, they will support changes in the schools at large, in a single school, or for a responsible group. Testing sentiment in advance is a necessary step for planners to take.

Some individuals and groups will oppose proposed changes on the grounds of costs, or because they are generally opposed to the schools or just dissatisfied with the state of society. We interviewed parents and children who objected to the alternative junior high school and some elementary school changes on the grounds that they were dangerously radical or encouraged permissiveness. It is to be expected that social or political convictions may cause opposition to some methods or subjects proposed for the schools. Where such objections are encountered they should be treated with respect and balanced against other views to judge their validity in terms of the need for the proposed changes.

A Need to Carefully Define and Set Goals

Educational changes are too often instituted with unclear definitions of substance and purpose; our respondents cited this as a problem in the situation under study. Given ambiguity in goals, subsequent attempts to evaluate effectiveness are likely to fail. The absence of precise definitions means that teaching and organization are without clear directions, thus leading to confusion, regrouping, subsequent attempts at clear definition and, after much delay, a better sense of purpose and a basis for accountability. In the latter process, however, much time is lost – and this is the valuable time of students engaged in the learning process.

It is manifestly difficult to precisely foretell how an educational change will work in practice. But the proposed change – improved instruction, individualization of study, more freedom for students in classes, a greater use of

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volunteers in the classroom, or greater autonomy for individual schools in a system – ought to be defined as explicitly as possible, and measurable goals be established for whatever areas of progress can be measured. The experience of this study reminds the writers that alternatives to traditional schooling are too often couched in "pie in the sky" rhetoric rather than in precise language.

Attention to Interests of All Consumers

The several changes undertaken in the school system under study were predicated on middle-class values and norms. These changes emphasized confidence in schooling as a preparation for life, an expansion of initiative and freedom for learners, greater efficiency in instruction, and closer relations between the schools and higher education. Even the basic goal of the superintendent, to decentralize and place control in the hands of school users, was based on the assumption that parents and neighborhood residents had the will, knowledge, and competence to take such control.

In the interviews, families of professional and business men appeared to understand the aims underlying changes, to be quite well informed about innovations, and to welcome them with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The innovative elementary and junior high schools were brought about or sustained by groups of primarily middle-class parents, who had the know-how necessary to study and lobby and whose educational aims matched those underlying the innovations. The use of learning centers in elementary schools, employment of aides, building of two junior high schools with an open design to increase learning flexibility – these were all changes that middle-class families knew about and, to varying degrees, approved of. The informed and decision-making persons interviewed, almost all middle class in background, also had the confidence, knowledge, and skills needed for participation in the changes. While some did not approve of certain changes, for a variety of reasons, they understood what was going on and tended to support alternative forms of public schooling.

On the other hand, members of working-class families, whether approving the changes, or not, frequently expressed a sense of being alienated from the decision-making process and from the school system as a whole. Both parents and children expressed, explicitly or implicitly, the feeling that "they" (other people) were making the changes, that "they" ran things, that "their children" got the best treatment in school. A number of these family members saw the schools as excellent for those intending to go to college and enter professions. But they said plainly that they were not included in the priorities of the school system and felt either completely left out or given a back seat.

While our evidence on this subject is limited, we hope it alerts educational planners to the need to consider all consumers of schooling and especially those most likely to be alienated, and to involve all as fully as possible in the planning process. We recommend that changes be thought through carefully to ensure that they will meet the needs of children of working-class, poor, and minority families – as perceived by them rather than by educators and middle-class decision-makers.

Now these are not easy goals to achieve. In the Athens district, representatives of the Black community had a set of demands on the public schools that emphasized equity for their group; they were not much concerned with the school district's major innovations. Some of the more alienated working-class families live in rural areas away from center of power in the district. The immediate needs of low-income families are more pressing to them than participation in free schools or arguments about a new type of report card. All of these groups feel cut off from the main channels of communication and power and, therefore, are suspicious of proposals not addressed to solving their problems.

A planning process for change must involve these groups. Reforms seen by them as necessary for their children should be on the agenda. The traditional ways of communicating, such as newsletters, public meetings, media coverage, PTA involvement, and citizen committees should be used with a special eye to reach families who are, for various reasons, cut off from the public schools. Means need to be devised to communicate with families on an individual basis, either through questionnaire or, preferably, through individual home visits, or carefully planned, small-group interviews. Both parents and children need to share in this process. The families interviewed were interested in talking about schooling and school issues. While this talking process takes manpower and time, it seems very worthwhile and not beyond the resources of a school district willing to recruit volunteers for the purpose. But we hope that this sort of public discussion of school issues and changes will be just that, discussion, and not the sort of one-way communicating which is done through news releases and talks.

School Board Meetings as Communication Agency

Public meetings of the board of education, particularly those designated for planning and discussion, are a necessary forum for school communications. Especially in a period when many and disturbing changes are being proposed or made, the quality of board meetings can be crucial in determining how well changes have been thought through, what results can be expected from what programs, how people feel about the proposals, and how the degree of public support can be measured. Such meet-

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ings also give citizens the chance to express themselves frankly to board members and administrators, a necessary, if sometimes unpleasant, catharsis.

Two board members and several other respondents in the Athens study indicated the importance of carefully planned board meetings, with agendas known to board members and the public in advance, and with an announced time schedule for consideration of each major topic. Also stressed was the importance of conducting meetings with decorum, adherence to parliamentary procedure, and equity of treatment for all interests. The quality of these meetings seems to connote to the community a good deal about the quality of the schools. Respondents indicated that at times during the period of significant change in the Athens district, school board meetings were poorly prepared for by administrators, featured intemperate debate among board members, and were so poorly conducted that individual citizens dominated large portions of meeting time. These respondents stressed that such occasions seemed to them to tell the public that the schools were in trouble, even if this was not so. They felt that if changes in schooling are generated in confusion and angry dispute, they are almost bound to run a gauntlet of criticism later.

Board meetings need to be conducted firmly, but in a way that encourages full expression of views; with parliamentary procedure but a reasonable informality in discussion, and with a decorum that sets limits to the style and kind of debate. While careful planning and adherence to announced agendas are essential conditions, a meeting should not be so formal and routine as to intimidate those with legitimate questions or statements of position.

Need for Balance in Any Change Process

Concentration on one or two dramatic or controversial changes in a school system may have the effect of taking attention away from other changes or from normal operations of schools and programs. A number of respondents affirmed that this had happened in the district under study; the bold new elementary and junior high schools tended to capture attention and invite spirited argument. Many teachers and parents felt, probably with justification, that their own school programs were being slighted. Teachers complained that many of the successful innovations in the district, such as learning centers and the use of aides, were largely ignored. Respondents seemed convinced that the schools had been slow to change except for showpiece changes of the two radically distinctive schools. This tendency, if indeed it existed, could retard further innovative steps in the system as a whole. As one observer reminded us, one or two particularly visible programs may "take the heat" off the schools at large, leaving them comfortably able to do business as usual.

We suggest that planners look at all changes as system-wide in influence and plan for that kind of change. When trial programs or methods are in place, administrators and board members need to give them all equal attention. Obviously, it is possible to institute major innovations in a compatible relationship with more moderate, ongoing changes; the point is that all reforms need to be viewed as part of a development pattern and evaluated, revised, or abandoned in full public view. This is difficult to accomplish. One change may invite intense public scrutiny because of its radical nature, whereas others will be accepted quietly by both staff and students as blending into established routines — thus creating a situation where parents and the general public may be unaware of the latter actions. But if changes are instituted on a system-wide basis, explained and appraised in newsletters and the media, and made part of a continuing two-way discussion between schools and consumers, the school district has probably done the best it can to achieve balance.

In the Athens district some critics felt that the widely discussed junior high school experiment was "divisive". It would be more accurate to say that this innovative school took the limelight and caused both the public and professionals to neglect or undervalue other changes taking place in the district.

Financing Changes

A new program or method in schooling may cost more per pupil to operate than its predecessor; it probably will cost at least as much. Even an innovation designed to save costs ultimately — as, for example, a new staffing pattern that raises the ratio of aides to teachers — in the early stages, is almost certain to cost as much or more than the preceding arrangement. A change needs careful planning, equipment, or materials, a training or orientation process, systematic evaluation to judge its effectiveness in early stages, and careful explanations to all concerned parties. To try to run a new program cheaply is to jeopardize its future.

Evidence from the Athens school district pointed strongly to an effort to justify changes as economical. Both the innovative elementary school and the alternative junior high school were conducted in old buildings (considered for abandonment) and were given minimal fiscal support; it seemed to some observers that the administration and board supported these ventures because they were cheap to operate. Much was made of staffing patterns that would be economical. Prospects for outside funding from the university and the state or federal government to support changes in the system were emphasized. The fact was stressed that new programs were justified if they cost no more per pupil than existing ones; critics seized upon bits of evidence that suggested higher costs for the new pro-

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grams. Observers got the impression that the chief aim of change was economy.

Every public school district is justifiably accountable for wise and efficient use of funds. There is growing evidence that the public is effectively resisting the mounting costs of schooling. We consider it sound economics to fund new programs and methods sufficiently to get them off the ground. We recommend that planners build adequate financing into proposed projects and fully inform the public of cost estimates. While long-run economies may be hoped for, it is poor planning to spend so little on changes that they fail to achieve results, thus wasting the initial investment. This should be made clear to consumers.

Professionals and Educational Change

Teachers and other professionals can be expected to participate willingly in changes only if they are involved in the planning and decision-making and are assured of sufficient financing for new programs. They will also need to see the innovations as educationally promising, and as not jeopardizing professional status. Now this is a large order. We can expect to have the skeptic ask how changes will ever be made if the professionals need such guarantees. But in an era of collective negotiations, when organized teachers feel themselves on the defensive, they can be expected to want to protect both themselves and the students when faced with significant changes in staffing, programs, or pedagogy.

We have only limited evidence concerning the attitudes of the profession toward the changes brought about in the Athens district. Respondents suspected that organized teachers were rather cool to the innovative elementary school (at least in the initial stage), to the alternative junior high school, and to some system-wide changes in staffing and organization. A substantial experiment in individualizing instruction in the senior high school failed to get full staff support. There is also evidence that the teachers as a group were not kept informed, were not included in the inception of some changes, were not assured of adequate financing for new programs, and felt that their own negotiating positions and welfare were threatened by some aspects of the changes. Teachers could have been much more effectively involved in the change process than they were, to the benefit of the innovations. A few respondents were, however, frankly skeptical of teachers as change agents, maintaining that they would oppose innovations as a matter of course.

We recommend a dominant place for teachers and other professionals in the change process, whether they tend to be cautious or innovative. It is essential that new programs benefit from professional judgment as well as have the continuing support of organized teachers. Professional assistance needs to come at the organizational level from a broad base of teachers and not just those who are innovative by temperment. While professional involvement may involve delay or concessions to cautious interests, it may also give new programs the necessary touches of reality and the basis for survival.

Providing an Environment Conducive to Change

Both system-wide and individual educational changes need to be made carefully and with attention to all concerned parties, as we have described in this section. Yet we can hear our critics now: "You have buried the chance for change in red tape," they will say, "guaranteeing that no change comes about without being hopelessly compromised." Admitting that the strategies we propose will be time consuming and that original plans will be modified, we believe that taking time, defining aims, consulting with appropriate parties, revising, and launching changes with careful explanation are responsibilities of planners in the public sector. Careful planning ought to result in better and more permanent changes in schooling.

There is a certain environment supporting change that is of crucial importance. Such an environment has been shown to produce a series of innovative and creative acts on the part of teachers and students all across a school system. The proper setting for change may best be found in the sort of plan envisaged by the superintendent of the Athens district: to decentralize and consign much decision-making to local school constituencies. Such a plan, encouraging the administrators, teachers, students, and parents of each school to engage in planning, to develop and try out new ideas, and to bear the consequences of their decisions, seems nearly perfect for purposes of moderate, individual innovations. One of the prime requisites, however, is to make sure that each responsible school has an adequate amount of money to support desired changes. Another requisite is the assurance, best expressed in behavior, that central administration and the board of education will not step in to abort or limit changes unless external factors make it absolutely necessary. For such changes we suggest a more informal decision-making process, one whereby sufficient money is available for short trials of the approved ideas submitted by individual teachers or groups of students or parents. The aims of any new departure from conventional ways should be stated clearly and so presented that the likelihood of success can be readily appraised.

Some of the most promising educational changes of this past decade have come from the partnership of professionals with such other groups as university specialists, local volunteers, parent and student groups, or creative citizens. In developing strategies that encourage change, we recommend that planners try to tap all available

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sources of appropriate talent and, where feasible, work out coalitions of professionals and laymen to design and carry through innovations. Students have proved to be creative as well as sound in suggesting and implementing changes. To the degree that a school system can open itself to help and ideas from the citizenry, it can escape from some of the perils to which its monopoly status exposes it.

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